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ABSTRACT

A series of four workshops for community administrators and public agency program directors in rural Stevens County, Washington, was intended to introduce and support the idea of networks among rural agencies and to increase community development skills in communication, problem solving, community organization, and group process. Trainers designed the content, theme, and activities in response to a needs assessment completed by participants, who were mostly relative newcomers to the county. The largely experiential training was designed to develop closer working relationships with the community, the ability to diagnose community power, and an understanding of decision making. Trainers developed materials and specific activities that reflected the rural isolated setting, the scarcity of resources, and the need for collaboration for increased effectiveness in areas such as Stevens County. They used feedback to modify the training as needs arose during the workshops. Activities were related to leadership styles, communication, communication skills, problem solving, conducting meetings, and group development and effectiveness. After the series, participants reported more effective working relationships within and among agencies, a greater awareness of the decision-making process, and a greater ability to effect change. Four training designs are included; these serve as the basic outline of the series. (SB)

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COMMUNITY SKILLS TRAINING: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

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Introduction

This case study documents one project which is representative of PRI's experiential training component available to public officials and citizens. This series of workshops is significant because of the collaborative nature of its origin, design and implementation.

The county where the training occured (Stevens County), represents a typical situation in the PRI service region: a rural, geographically isolated area. The area is characterized by a number of south-trending mountain ranges and corresponding river valleys. Many of the timber-covered mountains rise to the 6,000 foot level from valley floors of 1,500 feet or less. Two artificial lakes are the dominant acquatic features of the county. The sparse population is generally restricted to valley lands where slope, water supply, transportation, and climate contribute to more favorable living conditions. The main industries of the area include logging, agriculture, mining and recreation. The percentage of population increase during the 1970-77 period was among the highest in the state. The rapid growth not only indicates increases in governmental and social service responsibilities, but increases in the diversity of lifestyles and potential values.

Community development in rural isolated areas, where resources are scarce, requires special skills on the part of citizens so that the process can continue after the consultants leave. In contrast to the urban setting, effective rural citizens are significantly more reliant upon interagency collaboration and network support systems. This training was intended to transfer such skills and establish such networks among the participants.

Case Study Report by Vicki Braglio Luther, PRI, Program Associate, and Gregory P. Spencer, PRI, Program Assistant, Eastern Sub-Region, Spokane. July, 1979.

Problem

The program began as a request for skill training by two members of the Subregional Committee (SRC), the advisory council for the PRI eastern subregion. These members felt that increased skills in communications, problem-solving, analysis of community organization, and group processes would benefit members of their communities. The purpose of the training was twofold: (1) to increase community development skills in participants and (2) to introduce and support the idea of networking and collaborative behaviors among participants.

Since the eastern subregion had already declared a program goal of training volunteers in the community development process and continuing to use these trained volunteers as "paraprofessionals" in other rural communities, this activity was seen as another way of responding to the needs of rural citizens.

The two SRC members not only managed all arrangements for use of Washington Community College District 17's facilities, but also conducted a publicity campaign that included several press releases, a mailing to interested persons and follow-up contact by phone and in person to encourage community leaders to attend. SRC members were also active participants in all four workshops. Their work at the local level enabled the training team to respond to a well-defined and shared goal for part of the group members.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Many of those involved in the training held administrative positions or functioned as project directors within an agency. The emphasis in the training of encouraging collaboration seems appropriate, given the need expressed by participants for closer working relations within the community. Another

factor in the success of the group's development, was that the majority of participants were relative newcomers (living in the county less than 10 years) and were able to share the experiences of finding employment and acceptance in their respective communities.

As a result of the unique conditions relative to Community Development work in rural areas, PRI has been exploring staffing arrangements that are conductive to such specialized needs. In this particular case, the four trainers themselves represent a collaborative effort, i.e., they work under the auspices of three different institutions (WSU, EWU, and WSCC #17), yet join together to present a common training series. By using a team approach the four trainers demonstrate collaborative behavior, as well as talk about it. Although each of the trainers has a common expertise in human relations training, their backgrounds are interdisciplinary representing education, anthropology, psychology, and agriculture, which further augments the notion of networking and integration.

TRAINING DESIGN

The times and general content areas of the training were negotiated among participants and training team at an initial meeting. Basic needs assessment activities conducted at that first meeting gave credibility to the first design and overall theme of the workshops. These training events were conducted entirely in an experiential mode. Structured small group activities, related to diagnosing community power and decision-making processes were tailored to the profile of participants.

An example of such an activity is a role play demonstrating the use of power and hidden agendas followed by an extended debriefing session. This is typical of the "do, look, learn" philosophy, where participants first work through a small group activity, then observe and explore its meaning to

them, and finally draw conclusions about its relevance in their community context.

Feedback as a design mechanism was used throughout by the trainers to modify a basic experiential design to particpant needs and priorities as they emerged. More importantly, materials and activities for the training were developed that reflect the rural isolated setting, the scarcity of resources and the unique opportunity for increased effective uses through the development of collaborative skills.

Four training designs follow and can serve as a basic outline of the training events. However, the true picture of any such event cannot be traced without the added dimensions of interpersonal differences, group interaction and trainers' style.

TRAINING DESIGN I

Time	Person	Description of Activity	Materials	Expected Outcomes			Modifications from Original Design
				Concepts	Skills	Attitudes	
3:00-3:15	Vicki	Warm-up	Handout:10 statements describing typical local activities, each beginning "FIND someone who has..."			Participants become acquainted quickly in a non-threatening way	
3:15-3:30	Vicki	Theory Input: Experiential vs Dydactic Learning	Handout:outline comparing learning theories		Increased understanding of a "do-look-learn" method of training		
3:30-4:15	Vicki Dwight	Self-Assessment: Leadership styles	task person questionnaire, scale & profile sheet		Self-evaluation in terms of task orientation and people orientation		
		BREAK					
4:25-6:05	Vicki Dwight	Communication Skills: Trio activity	Handouts: •paraphrase •sharing feelings •perception check •behavior description		Practice in using four basic communication skills		
6.05-6.30	Vicki	Evaluation & Review	written feedback by individuals		Participant input into next training design		

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TRAINING DESIGN II

Time	Person	Description of Activity	Materials	Expected Outcomes			Modifications from Original Design
				Concepts	Skills	Attitudes	
3:00-3:20	Greg Dwight	Warm-up: group starter "elephants & giraffes"		To prepare participants for meetings			
3:20-4:10	Team	Ball game: Controlling and influencing communication	Ball for ea. small group Handout: "Conditions which hinder effective communication	To explore the dynamics of assuming leadership in a group; to increase awareness of the power held by the member who is speaking; to diagnose communication patterns in a group			
		BREAK					
4:20	Dwight Greg Team	•Review communication skills •Introduce Process Observation •Pine County: Information Sharing	Handouts: •Briefing sheets •Summary of candidates •Solution sheets •Process Observation forms	To explore the effects of collaboration and competition in group problem-solving; to study how task-relevant information is shared within a work group; to observe problem-solving strategies within a group; to demonstrate the impact of various leadership styles on task accomplishment			
6:00-6:30	Team	Evaluation	Written response by participants	To solicit feedback to use in future planning			

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TRAINING DESIGN III

Time	Person	Description of Activity	Materials	Expected Outcomes			Modifications from Origional Design
				Concepts	Skills	Attitudes	
3:00-3:15	Greg	Warm-up: Machine		To prepare participants for meeting. (physical activity to help with mid-afternoon slump)			
3:15	Vicki	Committee Meeting: Hidden Agendas	•Briefing sheets •Role cards •Observation sheets	To illustrate the effects of hidden agendas on task accomplishment in a work group			
4:05	Team	Debrief activity BREAK					
4:45-5:40	Team	Theory Input: What Makes an Effective Group? •Small group activity: read, discuss and report back on three handouts	Handouts: What Makes an Effective Group?	To explore the nature of collaborative behaviors in the development of working groups			
5:45-5:15	Greg	Task Activity: Come to consensus on where do we go for dinner after training	Flip Chart	To use consensus techniques in a group setting and have fun			
5:15-	Vicki	Evaluation	Written responses of participants	To solicit feedback to use in future training			

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TRAINING DESIGN IV

Time	Person	Description of Activity	Materials	Expected Outcomes			Modifications from Original Designer
				Concepts	Skills	Attitudes	
3:00-3:15	Greg	Warm-up "Are you my friend?"		To engage the group in enjoyable, relaxing game			
3:15-4:45	Greg	FIRO: Theory of group development	Charts Blackboard	To illustrate Schutz theory of affection inclusion and control as impacting group development			
		BREAK					
5:00-6:15	Vicki	Back Home Application: Cybernetics Session	Tables, chairs, charts	To gather information from each participant on 5 training-related issues agreed upon by the group			
6:15-6:30	Vicki	Evaluation	Written response by participants	Evaluate overall effectiveness of four training events			

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OUTCOMES

Outcomes of this training workshop have been significant. First of all, participants felt strongly enough about the skills they gained to encourage other community members to attend a subsequent workshop. Second, participants have reported more effective working relationships within, and among, agencies. Finally, and most significantly, through this "hands-on" training, participants claim to have achieved a greater awareness of the decision-making process, and have increased their ability to impact that structure and facilitate purposive change.

PRI GOALS

This project has enabled partner resources (WSU, EWU, WSCC #17) to be delivered to the rural area, and fits with the overall goals and model of PRI.

The irony of the inadequacy of internal local resources to unilaterally generate rural improvement, and the dependency that external resources have upon local decisions, has been dealt with. In this case, local leaders identified the need and sought out external resources; the latter provided expertise and training based on the local decisions.

PRI's assumption that rural improvement will be greater as a consequence of collaborative interdependence and greater utilization of knowledge, in contrast to independent and wide-spread actions taken separately by each agency or organization, was implemented via the training series. Since nearly all of the local agencies with mandates for public service were represented, the workshops provided an opportunity for leaders and representatives to share information and plan strategies for cooperating on future programs and action.

At the barest minimum, by virtue of contact, participants were able to place names with faces, and increase the likelihood, for example, of one

administrator picking up the phone and contacting another regarding a related project.

For rural citizens to be effective, they must significantly rely upon interagency collaboration and network support systems. The Community Development process, on this occasion, successfully took the form of training citizens, transferring necessary skills and establishing community networks among participants.